

LIVESTOCK

RANGE AND PASTURE FEED: Encouraging winter and spring precipitation was cut short by hot, dry conditions that persisted during much of the remainder of the year. Soil moisture and range and pasture conditions rapidly deteriorated by mid-year. Despite early July and early August rains, range and pasture feed supplies never recovered and remained well below 1997 levels during the rest of 1998.

CATTLE AND CALVES: New Mexico's inventory of all cattle and calves as of January 1, 1999, climbed to 1.62 million head, 1 percent above a year earlier and the highest level since 1976. While the beef cow herd also rose 1 percent to 572,000 head, it fell slightly short of the 1997 inventory. The count of beef replacement heifers, however, slipped 5 percent to 105,000 head. The state's dairy herd continued to set records and by January 1, 1999, had risen to 218,000 milk cows, 12th largest in the nation. Dairy heifers kept for replacement were up 10 percent to 55,000 head. The inventory of bulls held steady at 50,000 head, and the number of steers and other heifers over 500 pounds fell slightly to 340,000 head. The 1998 calf crop was up 3 percent to 620,000 head and the number on hand on January 1, 1999, stood at 280,000 head, up 6 percent from a year earlier. The inventory of cattle and calves on feed fell to 118,000 compared to 123,000 on January 1, 1998. The 1998 gross income from cattle and calves dropped 6 percent to \$736 million.

DAIRY: After two years of more moderate growth, the state's dairy herd made significant expansion during 1998. The average number of cows milked for the year increased 7 percent to 217,000 head. Total milk production climbed to almost 4.4 billion pounds, up 9 percent from 1997, and placing New Mexico as the 11th largest producer in the nation. The average dairy cow in the state produced 20,065 pounds of milk during 1998 compared to 19,856 pounds a year earlier, and the 4th highest average in the United States. Producer gross income rose to a record \$654 million.

SHEEP AND LAMBS: New Mexico's sheep inventory continued to decline; and as of January 1, 1999, totaled 275,000 head, down 5 percent from the previous year. The number of sheep and lambs for slaughter market fell to 50,000 head and the inventory of stock sheep was down to 225,000 head. Despite a good lambing rate during 1998, the total lamb crop slipped 3 percent to 165,000 head. Producer gross income for the year fell 20 percent to \$9.9 million. Wool production for 1998 totaled 2.4 million pounds, off 7 percent; and because of the much lower average wool price, the value of production was down 23 percent to \$2.1 million.